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Department of Energy Fines Fluor Daniel Hanford for Nuclear Safety Violations

The Department of Energy will fine Fluor Daniel Hanford Inc., operator of the Hanford Site in Washington state, for violations of the department's nuclear safety rules at the Hanford Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP), including several associated with the May 1997 explosion that caused significant damage and some release of radioactivity to the facility.

The proposed fine of \$140,625 covers four categories of violations, each classified "Severity Level II" on a three-tiered scale of potential safety significance. Violations associated with the May chemical explosion included the contractor's failure to assure that breathing devices operated effectively, failure to make timely notifications of the emergency, and failure to conduct proper radiological surveys of workers — all required by the contractor's own procedures.

This Department of Energy enforcement action involves only those aspects of the explosion that indicated violations of the department's nuclear safety requirements. Following the explosion, Energy Secretary Federico Peña directed a much broader, detailed and comprehensive evaluation of emergency and chemical storage procedures at each departmental site. In addition, Washington state regulators have taken separate enforcement actions related to the Hanford event.

The other violations cited by the department in this action include a number of events between November 1996 and June 1997 involving Fluor Daniel Hanford's failure to assure adherence to PFP criticality safety procedures. Criticality safety procedures are developed and implemented by the contractor to assure safe handling of fissile materials and prevention of a criticality (an unplanned and uncontrolled chain reaction that can release large amounts of radiation). Because of the potential consequences of such an event, the Department of Energy views any violation of criticality safety procedures to be an extremely serious concern.

The department's investigation determined that criticality safety procedure violations at the PFP were multiple and recurring, and included events such as storing and transporting small quantities of plutonium material in violation of criticality administrative controls, violations of procedures requiring personnel to know and comply with criticality limits and postings, and multiple failures to identify and correct criticality safety infractions.

In some cases, supervisors were aware of the problems but failed to correct them in a timely fashion. Fluor Daniel Hanford's subcontractor, B&W Hanford Company, curtailed movement of fissile materials at the PFP.

The violations resulted from the work of two Fluor Daniel Hanford subcontractors — B&W Hanford Company and DynCorp Tri-Cities Services Inc. However, as the managing contractor for the site, Fluor Daniel Hanford is responsible for ensuring compliance with nuclear safety requirements. Fluor Daniel Hanford is responsible for the non-reimbursable fine and assurance that appropriate corrective steps are identified, are taken and are effective.

The Preliminary Notice of Violation will become final in 30 days unless the violations are denied with sufficient justification. The Price-Anderson Amendments Act directed the Department of Energy to develop and enforce nuclear safety rules with its contractors. Additional information on this action and other aspects of the enforcement program is available via the Internet at <http://tis-nt.eh.doe.gov/enforce>

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